

# For Immediate Release



**EAT RIGHT MONTANA**

*A coalition promoting healthy eating and active lifestyles*

[www.eatrightmontana.org](http://www.eatrightmontana.org)

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**MT Department of Public Health & Human Services**

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## Montana Schools Celebrate Gold Medal Performances

Two Montana elementary schools are joining an exclusive national group this month. Ponderosa School in Billings and Hawthorne School in Bozeman have received Gold Awards in the US Department of Agriculture's (USDA) HealthierUS School Challenge program. Administered by USDA's Food and Nutrition Service (FNS), the program recognizes schools that are creating healthy environments by promoting excellence in nutrition and physical activity.

"I am very proud that four Montana schools have been honored for their leadership in student health and wellness," says State Superintendent of Public Instruction Linda McCulloch. "Hawthorne and Ponderosa now join Box Elder and Lolo Elementary as USDA HealthierUS School Challenge winners in Big Sky country. Our office salutes the efforts of Montana's School Nutrition and Team Nutrition staff in supporting these schools and we look forward to celebrating their success at events in Bozeman on October 9th and Billings on October 10th."

To qualify for Gold awards, Ponderosa and Hawthorne schools submitted detailed applications documenting adherence to HealthierUS School Challenge criteria for their lunch menus, nutrition education, opportunities for physical activity, and guidelines for foods and beverages sold outside of the National School Lunch Program. The schools also maintained an average daily participation in the lunch program of 70 percent or greater. By meeting these required standards of excellence, Ponderosa and Hawthorne schools are enhancing both their students' health and their academic performance.

"We recognize the importance of school meals in children's lives," says Billings Food Services Manager Bette Hunt. "Our foodservice staff carefully plans breakfast and lunch menus that provide the nutritional balance which helps our students be fit, healthy, and ready to learn. Over the past few years, we have made many improvements, like adding fresh spinach to our salad mix and reformulating our pizza to be lower in fat." The Bozeman School District has also made significant nutritional changes, including more 'from scratch' entrées, an increased variety of colorful fruits and vegetables, the addition of skim milk in place of 2% milk, and a freshly baked whole wheat roll offered daily in all of the district schools.

"When children are well-nourished and physically fit, they are better able to pay attention in class and do well on tests," says Registered Dietitian Sherri Pearson, Assistant Manager of Food Service in Bozeman schools. "In addition to teaching smart eating habits with classroom lessons, we are working hard to raise family and community awareness of the positive changes in our local school nutrition program." In Billings, the School Health Advisory Council (SHAC) is also looking at cost-effective ways to improve the nutritional quality of food and beverage options in vending machines and fundraisers.

Innovative programs to increase students' physical activity were another key reason for the gold recognition of Ponderosa and Hawthorne Elementary Schools by the USDA. Outstanding health enhancement teachers - Deb Kewer in Billings and Lynda Stuber in Bozeman - have been instrumental in creating fun ways to get kids up and moving, such as recess walking programs, playground dance contests, and school-based teams for Big Sky Fit Kids ([www.bigskyfitkids.org/](http://www.bigskyfitkids.org/)).

Past and current issues of Eat Right Montana's monthly packets can be downloaded for free at

[www.eatrightmontana.org/eatrighthealthyfamilies.htm](http://www.eatrightmontana.org/eatrighthealthyfamilies.htm)

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